

Mayor's Inaugural Speech – November 7, 2022

I would like to get us started by acknowledging that we meet this evening on the homelands of the ləkʷəŋən speaking peoples represented by the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and the WSÁNEĆ peoples represented by the WJOLELP (Tsartlip), BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin), STÁUTW (Tsawout), WSIKEM (Tseycum) and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nations.

On behalf of the newly elected Council, it's my great pleasure to welcome you to your Council chamber for this evening's Inaugural Meeting of Saanich Council.

Thank you to the Esquimalt Nation's Joseph Singers and Dancers for opening this evening's events.

I also wish to honour the two outgoing councillors, Rebecca Mersereau and Ned Taylor and the outgoing Mayor, Fred Haynes. We are grateful for your service and commitment to the people of Saanich. Saanich and the region are better places because of your leadership.

We thank those who helped strengthen our democracy by putting themselves forward in this year's election. We also thank the tens of thousands who showed up to mark their ballot. We are grateful for the trust you have placed in your newly elected mayor and council. It is an honour and a privilege to serve the people of Saanich.

I want to congratulate Colin Plant, Susan Brice, Zac de Vries, Judy Brownoff, Mena Westhaver, Nathalie Chambers, Karen Harper and Teale Phelps Bondaroff on your successful election to Saanich Council. I look forward to working together with these eight outstanding individuals, who bring both experience and fresh ideas to the Council table.

While tonight is an opportunity to celebrate the beginning of a new term and the opportunities and challenges ahead, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the challenges that we've come through. Under the previous Council's leadership, the dedicated staff here at Saanich brought creativity and remarkable resilience to the consistent delivery of high quality services to Saanich residents throughout the pandemic. Despite restrictions and ever-changing public health guidance, staff and crews continued to deliver services that allowed us to maintain connections with our neighbours, take part in healthy activities and enjoy this great community. The people of Saanich thank you for your commitment and we are grateful for your service.

The pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. As an organization, that can mean high-levels of stress as people are stretched thin to do their jobs in a changing environment and with uncertain conditions. As we come through the challenges of the pandemic, I want staff to know that your council is here to support you and ensure you have the resources and tools you need to do the job effectively in service to the people of Saanich.

I also want to pause for a moment to acknowledge the extraordinary impact of the events that took place on June 28th. The horrific shooting incident on Shelbourne street shocked our community and the events of that day continue to take a toll on our police department and first responders. To the injured officers and first responders, we hold you and your families in our hearts. Your community is grateful for your courageous service. To all the members of our police department, we stand with you and support you as you manage the ongoing impacts of these events and the toll that they've taken.

Coming together for a stronger future

As your new Council comes together, we do so with a focus on the priorities that you have made clear to each of us during the election. Priorities that will guide Saanich over the course of this term. Priorities that will not swell to a number that is unrealistic. They are focused priorities that create a stronger future for everyone in Saanich.

Together, we are facing a variety of challenges, and with them, a corresponding number of opportunities. We will be successful in tackling them if we face them united as a community.

Our job is clear; we are here to serve you. Your mayor and council have got your back on the things that matter to you and your family. Everyone deserves a home. Our streets must be safe for everyone to get around. We must do our part to protect against the changing climate. Our economy will be vibrant and strong. Government decision-making will be transparent and accountable, contributing to a healthy democracy. Our shared future success depends on these imperatives.

Reconciliation

While we begin each meeting with a territorial acknowledgment, our commitment to Reconciliation, decolonization and a stronger future with the ləkʷəŋən speaking peoples and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples goes deeper than words.

As a settler on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples, I acknowledge that colonialism, racism and oppression continue to this day. I am committed to examining and challenging the systems of oppression and dispossession which have privileged me and my family. Privilege that comes at the expense of First Nations, Inuit, Metis and Indigenous peoples.

I come to this role with a desire to build stronger relationships with the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations and W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council. I intend to listen, learn, and collaborate so that we might move forward at the pace of trust. I know that this is the intention and desire shared by all members of this Council.

In the last term, staff worked with W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council staff to create ÁTOL,NEUEL. A Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Mayor and W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council Chiefs in a ceremony on December 3, 2021.

We are committed to walking this path together with W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership as we implement the ÁTOL,NEUEL. We are also committed to and look forward to further development of relationships with the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

Creating homes

Housing affordability remains our biggest challenge. On the doorstep I heard too many stories of residents leaving because they cannot afford or find a home in Saanich. We need to turn the tide on this troubling trend. It is clear that we need to take urgent action to create more homes for all incomes and stages of life. Everyone should be able to afford to call Saanich home.

In the last term, Council approved the **Housing Strategy**, which sets out strategies and initiatives to address housing affordability, diversity, and supply. This term, Council will turn that strategy into action to deliver the results that Saanich residents expect.

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We will prioritize working with the non-profit housing sector to access senior government funding to create non-market rental homes that are geared to income. Our biggest opportunity lies in what we do with public land. Saanich's properties, like the Nellie McClung library branch, represent partnership opportunities that allow us to create affordable homes and urgently-needed services like doctors offices and child care spaces. The services and amenities that enhance our quality of life.

For too many people, single family homes are now out of their price range. This term, we will undertake a process to revise our neighbourhood zones to make it easier to create more attainable family-suitable homes like duplexes, triplexes and townhouses. We will give families real options for a future here.

For renters in our community, the challenge of finding accommodation at a price they can afford is daunting. This term, we will prioritize purpose-built rental with updated zoning to make it easier to build rental homes in places where people want to live and close to where they need to go. We will also create incentives to ensure that existing rental is protected and remains affordable for people renting. We can't afford to displace people nor turn affordable rental into higher-priced new construction.

Safe Mobility in Saanich

Road safety remains at the top of mine and many residents' minds. In the past year, Saanich has suffered loss of life and serious injury on our roads. Fatalities and serious injuries are not something we will continue to accept. No individual or family should have to endure loss or life-changing injury. This term, Council will prioritize road safety to ensure everyone can get around safely on our roads.

In the past, severe injuries and fatalities were considered an inevitable consequence of living in a world with cars.

We know better now. Today, more responsibility is placed on policy makers, transportation professionals, and police to ensure that roads are safe for all road users. We will take this responsibility to heart, by taking corrective action to ensure everyone can get around safely.

Development of a **Road Safety Action Plan** is currently underway and its adoption will be a priority for your new Council. This plan will be our guide to achieving Vision Zero in Saanich.

This approach is critical because it prioritizes human life and health, and guides safety work that focuses on systems-level changes above influencing individual behaviour, and where speed is recognized as the fundamental factor in crash severity.

Staff have begun work on the **Speed Limit Establishment Policy**, which provides modern and progressive guidance for setting appropriate speed limits on all Saanich streets. We expect to see Street and Traffic Bylaw amendments in support of that new approach to setting speed limits in the first part of 2023.

Improvements that make it easier to walk, ride or roll are guided by the active transportation plan, **Moving Saanich Forward**. It's a plan that I am immensely proud of. When it was adopted in 2018, it was a first of its kind for Saanich and served as a blueprint to build a network of cycling infrastructure and connected, walkable and accessible neighbourhoods.

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That plan is now reaching the end of its first five years. Staff have begun work on updating our active transportation plan. The updated plan will guide our investments and decision-making to create a complete network. We will give people safer, more convenient ways of getting to school, jobs and services.

In addition to sidewalks, bike lanes and trails, creating stronger, more connected and accessible neighbourhoods relies on high quality public transit. For students getting to school, working professionals getting to jobsite, and older adults getting to appointments, bus service needs to be reliable, affordable and convenient.

We have five Members of the Legislative Assembly representing our region sitting at the provincial cabinet table. This is an extraordinary opportunity to work together with the Province to improve transit and attract more riders with higher quality and more rapid service. As the largest municipality in the region, Saanich will be a leader, working with our regional partners, to secure investments in transportation infrastructure for the South Island.

Adapting to Climate Change

Coming off a long dry summer – the driest period in our region's history – with record-setting temperatures and smoky skies as late as mid-October, we're now bracing for heavy rains that can quickly lead to flood conditions. The realities of climate change are upon us. We owe our children and grandchildren a stronger future than heat domes, flooding and more extreme weather. Council will prioritize scaling up our response to be better prepared for those climate impacts as well as redoubling our efforts to reduce our emissions.

Our natural systems are our best defence against the impacts of climate change. A robust tree canopy and understory that supports a diverse ecosystem contribute to the natural beauty and quality of place that we all enjoy. As importantly, the shade from that canopy will protect us from intense summer temperatures. Trees will help absorb stormwater during intense rain events and enrich the air with oxygen and absorb pollution.

During the campaign, you heard my commitment to plant 100,000 trees by 2032. That's 10,000 trees a year on public lands, boulevards and private properties. It's a target that will challenge us and I've begun discussions with staff about how that goal forms part of the **Urban Forest Strategy**.

Of course, reforestation and natural system restoration are only part of our approach. In the last term, Council approved Saanich's updated Climate Plan, **100% Renewable and Resilient Saanich**, which sets out strategies and initiatives to reduce our corporate and community emissions and energy use. Council will prioritize actions that get at our biggest emissions sources: buildings and transportation.

We will continue to promote zero-carbon travel by working with senior governments and regional partners to expand the public EV charging network and continue to offer incentives for eBikes and cargo bikes that replace motorized travel.

This term, staff will undertake a **Building Retrofit Strategy** to reduce energy use and emissions from residential and commercial buildings through upgrades and improvements.

A stronger local economy

Our most effective action to reduce our emissions is creating 15-minute neighbourhoods. Places where people can walk, bike or roll to schools, parks and shopping. Creating these accessible, walkable neighbourhoods is also a foundational economic opportunity for Saanich.

The pandemic reinforced for many of us the desirability of neighbourhood destinations like coffee shops, corner stores, small restaurants, and doctor's offices that are just down the street from where we live. Places to meet our friends, families and neighbours. Local businesses that create local jobs in our neighbourhoods.

This term, we will build a stronger local economy by updating our neighbourhood zones to make it easier for local businesses to set up shop in our neighbourhoods.

Transparent and accountable decision-making

Saanich residents expect transparency in the decision-making process and from their decision-makers. We're living in a period of distrust for institutions and the people who make decisions. Governments can help to build trust by making information more easily available concerning the decisions of your elected representatives.

This term, we will promote greater transparency by publishing a **Council Voting Dashboard** that tracks council decisions. We will create a **Lobbyist Registry** to be transparent about who your representatives are meeting with, and we will implement an **Ethics Commissioner** to advise your Mayor and Council on good governance.

Working together requires trust. It is at the heart of all relationships. With these actions, we can build, maintain and promote trust, honesty and integrity in service to you, the people of Saanich.

Regional Partnerships and the Citizens Assembly

Looking across the region at the newly elected leaders around the South Island, we have a unique opportunity to work together as partners. To our counterparts and colleagues around the region, Saanich is ready and willing to work as a regional partner to achieve better outcomes for the people of Saanich and the region. Whether that's a new model for transportation governance, finding more efficient ways of delivering services together, or securing senior government funding for affordable housing, you can count on Saanich to be at the table.

Working together, this term, we are going to deliver on the direction that voters gave us back in 2018, without delay. Saanich is committed to working with the City of Victoria to appoint a **Citizens Assembly** and support that body to explore the pros and cons of amalgamating with Victoria. When the Citizens Assembly, led by residents, has completed its work and delivered a recommendation, we will hold a referendum and we will implement the direction that we are given by Saanich voters.

Conclusion

The challenges we are facing this term are significant. They also bring with them abundant opportunities to build a stronger, more resilient future for everyone in Saanich. I know that by working together, we will put the building blocks in place for that future.

We are here to serve you. Your mayor and council have got your back on the things that matter. We will build affordable homes. We will make our streets safe for everyone to get around. We will protect against the changing climate. We will build a stronger local economy. We will be

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transparent and accountable. Our shared future success depends on these imperatives, and we will need your support on this shared journey.

Like my newly elected colleagues around the Council table, I am humbled and honoured by the opportunity to serve you. Being the Mayor of Saanich is a truly awesome responsibility and one that I take very seriously. I know this new council and I will do our very best to honour the trust you have placed in us.

We are excited to begin. Thank you for joining us.